

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
BUDGET ESTIMATES 2017

Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre

Question No. BE17-203

Senator Watt asked the following question on 18 August 2017:

Senator WATT: On 28 February this year, you announced an audit of Centrelink's automated debt-recovery problem. When are those inquiries likely to be concluded?

Mr Pilgrim: Again, I'll just check with the deputy commissioner.

Ms Falk: We recently sent a letter to DHS outlining our assessment program. The first assessment is to commence shortly. That assessment will continue during the next quarter. Once concluded, our normal practice is for assessment reports to be made public on our website.

Senator WATT: So, in saying that you would undertake an audit of the debt-recovery problems, the way that's actually put into practice is through an assessment program—is that right?

Ms Falk: That's right. Under the Privacy Act, there's an audit power otherwise known as an assessment power. Following the Commonwealth Ombudsman's report, the office decided to await further action by the department in terms of the implementation of those recommendations and then conduct an assessment of their implementation.

Senator WATT: So is it fair to say, then, that that assessment has not yet commenced but will do so?

Ms Falk: That's correct.

Senator WATT: Will that be as part of your annual program and that kind of thing?

Ms Falk: That's correct.

Senator WATT: Did you say when you think that that will start?

Ms Falk: I can refer to my notes and give you the precise time. Otherwise, I can take that on notice for you.

From memory, I think the date we sent the notification to the department was 8 August.

Senator WATT: So it's actually just started?

Ms Falk: That's correct. We've just initiated it.

The response to the honourable Senator's question is as follows:

The Office of the Australian Information Commissioner's (OAIC) privacy assessment (under s 33C of the Privacy Act) in relation to the Department of Human Services' (DHS) Pay As You Go (PAYG) data matching program and its Online Compliance Intervention (OCI) system (referred to as the Centrelink's automated debt raising and recovery system in the Commonwealth Ombudsman's report¹), commenced on 8 September 2017, when formal notification of the privacy assessment was sent to DHS.

¹ Centrelink's automated debt raising and recovery system: A Report About The Department of Human Services' Online Compliance Intervention System for Debt Raising and Recovery – April 2017

The response provided during the hearing to the honourable senator Watt's question refers to notification sent to DHS on 8 August 2017. This notification concerns the commencement of an assessment involving DHS' data matching activities under the Non-Employment Income Data Matching (NEIDM) program. The OAIC will submit a clarification to the committee clarifying this part of the record.